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TO RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI IMMEDIATE 3913
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001145

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV RU GG
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN MFA SAYS GEORGIAN COUP ATTEMPT A SURPRISE

REF: TBILIS 00852

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle: Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) In a 1300 May 5 conversation with the Ambassador, Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin expressed "surprise" at reports of a coup attempt in Georgia, reiterating that the event was unexpected. Karasin dismissed Georgian MinInt Merabishvili's accusations of Russian special services involvement as an attempt "to cast a shadow over what is obvious," suggesting that Georgian internal opposition to Saakashvili, and not Russian intervention, was at play. When the Ambassador pressed on news reports of Russian ship movements in the area, Karasin said he was unaware of the alleged movements, but took the charges seriously, and would be in contact with the Russian Ministry of Defense. The Ambassador and Karasin agreed to speak again later in the afternoon.

¶2. (C) When we contacted the MFA 4th CIS Department prior to the Ambassador's conversation, Director Andrey Kelin said it was the first that he had heard of the allegations. A seemingly rattled Kelin acknowledged that there had been a Russian troop buildup as the GOR introduced border forces into the region, but iterated steps already taken to lower the Russian profile and promised a "serious reduction" in the days ahead. He denied any GOR contacts with the mutinous Georgian forces. While Russia's policy of refusing to engage with Saakashvili remained in place, Kelin denied any GOR support for the overthrow of Georgia's elected President. Kelin also agreed to speak later in the day, after the MFA comes up to speed on the situation.

BEYRLE